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THE MONROE DOCTRINE AND THE CANNING MYTH

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On the twelfth of December, 1826, George Canning, then prime minister of England, made the proud statement in the House of Commons: "I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old." This striking sentence, pronounced as it was by one of the greatest figures which the English parliamentary system ever produced, has received wide credence ever since, even our own writers admitting that his suggestions had much to do with the wording and promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine. In South America, the belief of the people in his controlling part in the acquisition and preservation of their liberty has caused the erection of more than a few monuments to his memory. It is to the credit of those warm-hearted peoples that these testimonials to him were not affected by the frank admission of his boast that he was actuated not by a love for liberty, but by his need for something new to support his foreign policy in European affairs.

The credit for the calling into existence of the New World belongs not to Canning, but to the splendid patriotism of those colonists who by means of many a pitched battle and arduous campaign drove out the Spanish, and even defeated an English army by the River Plate. Theirs is the glory of having alone and unaided gained for themselves the great boon of political independence. All hail, then, to San Martin, to Bolivar, to Sucre, to all their glorious and victorious brothers-in-arms! We shall see that Canning was equally unentitled to the credit of guaranteeing their hard-won independence against the land-hunger of Europe, which has made of Africa a congeries of European dependencies; this credit belongs to the people of the United States who, by means of President Monroe's message, that first clarion call of Pan-Americanism, cried out to all the world, "Hands off! these are our sister republics of this, the hemisphere of freedom."

It is our purpose to show from documents, some long forgotten, some recently published, that Canning himself knew that his boast was an empty one, that his remarks to Rush (American min-

ister in London) had nothing to do with framing the Monroe Doctrine, that it was Rush who, entirely without authority, suggested the co-operation of England with America (just as he had suggested it five years before to Castlereagh), that he, Canning, was surprised by the terms of Monroe's message, was opposed to its guarantee of South American liberty as against Spain, and also to its forbidding Europe to plant colonies in this hemisphere.

The chief reason for the credence generally accorded on this side of the ocean to Canning's claim is Rush's expressed belief that Canning's suggestions were largely responsible for the Monroe Doctrine. It was but natural that Rush should have come to believe this. It was only human for him to attach undue importance to certain remarks of Canning's of which he would figure in history as the medium of communication to his own government. He realized and reported the deep impression made in Europe by the policy announced by President Monroe, but we shall see how far Canning's private views coincided with Rush's beliefs.

Rush tells us that toward the end of August, 1823 (the Monroe Doctrine was not announced until December 2 of that year), after he had broached the subject to Canning of England's following our lead in recognizing the independence of the Spanish American colonies (which we had already done in 1822), Canning sounded him as to whether there could be effected some public expression "intimating the joint disapprobation of Great Britain and the United States of any projects which might be cherished by any European power, of a forcible enterprise for reducing the (Spanish) colonies to a subjugation on the behalf or in the name of Spain; or the acquisition of any part of them to itself by cession or conquest." A similar proposition was made by Canning to France October 9, 1823. It seems to have been entirely overlooked or forgotten that Canning, when interrogated in Parliament "whether the King of Spain would be allowed by this country to seek to cover His Transatlantick Colonies," contented himself with stating "that the mother country had the right to attempt to recover her colonies, but that no foreign power had the right to make that attempt in her behalf." How quickly this was forgotten appears from the fact that shortly thereafter Canning, himself forgetting it, made his famous boast. The struggling colonies heard only of his boast and not of his willingness to return them to Spain from whom they had just won their independence. Also there

has been generally overlooked Rush's report that on November 24, 1823, Canning expressed his belief that a monarchy would be the best form of government for the Spanish colonies—a true friend of struggling republics indeed!

In many writers there may be noted a certain restlessness—a note of protest that so inspiring a triumph for liberty in our hemisphere as was the continued freedom of the Spanish colonies, should have to acknowledge a source no higher up the stream of international ethics than the scheming of a politician who openly claimed that he had created South American liberty to use it as a pawn in his game of European politics! Must we admit that the Monroe Doctrine had its rise in the whirlpool of European chicane, and only later joined the majestic stream of liberty whose fountain head was the Declaration of Independence? I have long felt how glaringly incongruous it was that a cause so far removed from international altruism should have produced so glorious a result, but it seemed impossible to find anything from an English source to disprove Canning's words, although many indications were available to show clearly that President Monroe was but announcing a widely cherished policy of the American people, and not launching a doctrine either invented by himself or suggested to him by any one European or American statesman. All of these indications antedate Canning's suggestion to Rush. The diary of John Quincy Adams, then secretary of state, shows that on May 13, 1818, President Monroe propounded the following question at a cabinet meeting: "Whether the ministers of the United States in Europe shall be instructed that the United States will not join in any project of interposition between Spain and the South Americans, which should not be to promote the complete independence of those provinces; and whether measures shall be taken to ascertain if this be the policy of the British government, and if so to establish a concert with them for the support of this policy." When, as a result of Rush's having introduced the subject, Castlereagh sounded him July 31, 1818, as to coöperation with the United States in respect to mediation between Spain and her colonies, Rush was already authorized to answer that we would not take part "except on the basis of the independence of the colonies." . . . "A determination to which his government had come on much deliberation." Note this "on much deliberation," and also that this was a full five years before he heard the suggestion from Canning upon which the latter and his

admirers based so much. Jefferson, in a letter of August 4, 1820, to William Short, says: "The day is not far distant when we may formally require a meridian of partition through the ocean which separates the two hemispheres, on the hither side of which no European gun shall ever be heard." No, there should never have been any misunderstanding, at least on this side of the water, as to how generally accepted was this policy of our people to maintain ours as a hemisphere of liberty, nor any ignorance of the fact that Monroe but enunciated an established policy instead of launching a new doctrine. It was but the natural outgrowth and development of Washington's famous declaration against entangling foreign alliances.

Notwithstanding how easy it has always been for a student of American history to show that Canning did not suggest the terms of the Monroe Doctrine, it was not until very recently that anything appeared by way of new evidence, which could conclusively prove that Canning knew when he made this boast that it was not a true one. The discovery to the world of this new evidence adds another chapter to the romance of historical "finds," the unearthing of which is so delightful to the student seeking the reasons for great events. Let us accompany him into the erudite atmosphere of his library where lie piled the dusty tomes and unpublished letters that smugly keep their own counsel and their writers' secrets. By such assiduous delving into ancient records did Funck-Brentano learn from the Archives de la Bastille the real identity of the mysterious wearer of the iron mask about whom Alexander Dumas wove so delightful a web of fiction. John Fiske tells us in his *American Revolution* that it was a similar quest among the old books in the library of the Strachey family at Sutton Court, in the county of Somerset, England, that brought to light the letter of General Charles Lee, written while in a British prison during the revolutionary war, which, some eighty years after the event took place, proved him to have been a traitor. How rightly Washington relieved him from his command after his then inexplicable behavior which so nearly lost us the battle of Monmouth! Imposing is the array of ghosts which have thus accusingly arisen from ancient documents to correct the history of events long misunderstood or incorrectly reported. And from whose forgotten writings shall we obtain unanswerable proof that Canning was not responsible for the Monroe Doctrine, and did not seek to guarantee the freedom of Spanish America? What source could be more convincing than his

own letters to Bagot, English minister to Russia, recently published by a member of the Bagot family? At last we can discard the dramatic statement of a politician made at a strategic moment to support his political purposes, and read the facts as privately written by him at the time to an intimate friend.

In an official letter dated at the foreign office, January 9, 1824, just after receiving news of Monroe's famous message, he says to Bagot: "How far that part of the speech of the President, which relates to Spanish America may have been prompted by a knowledge of the sentiments of His Majesty's government upon that subject, it is impossible to say." Speaking of the differences between those sentiments and this speech he goes on to say, "The first and most essential difference is that the government of the United States has actually acknowledged the independence of the late Spanish Colonies, while His Majesty's government continues still to withhold such recognition. If the message of the President is to be considered as objecting to an attempt to recover her dominions on the part of Spain herself, there is again as important a difference between his view of the subject and ours as perhaps it is possible to conceive." The "New World" which he later claimed to have created could have again become subject to Spain, if only he be first allowed to use it in "redressing the balance of the Old!" Continuing he says: "It is hardly necessary for me to add that the principle (if principle it may be called) which is brought forward in the President's speech, prohibiting all further colonization on the continents of America, is as new to this government as to that of France." A frank and full statement that Canning would not oppose our sister republics losing their liberty to Spain, nor wished them closed in the future to European colonization! Could anything be further from the Monroe Doctrine? Their temporary liberty was only to suit his political policy, and then, so far as he cared, they could be turned back to Spain, or colonized as has been India, or Egypt, or Algiers or Tripoli! At last the cat is out of the (letter) bag. As to the long-believed theory that he and Rush (he as the originator and Rush as the transmitter) had contributed greatly to the preparing of the famous doctrine, hear this excerpt from the same letter of Canning: "I lost no time in applying amicably to Mr. Rush for an explanation for that part of the President's speech. Mr. Rush professed to be wholly unprovided with instructions on the subject

He says that he has not heard from his government since the opening of Congress, nor even received officially a copy of the President's speech." This was privately written in January, 1824, and in December, 1826, Canning had the effrontery to make the public statement in the House of Commons; "I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old!" He outdid Little Jack Horner in that he not only shouted "What a big boy am I," but also claimed the credit both for pulling out the plum and for baking the pudding. Why not carve on the base of his statues in South America, "He approved the return of Spanish rule. He preferred monarchies instead of republics in South America."

His lack of interest in the continued freedom of the South Americans either from a renewed Spanish rule, or from their colonization by some other European power, makes it but natural that his first minister accredited to those newly born republics, Lord Ponsonby, should entertain such an attitude of mind toward them as to write home in 1826: "No eye ever saw so odious a country as this Buenos Ayres. I will not trust myself to speak of it;" and on October 17 of the same year, to write even more disparagingly of the Brazilians in a letter which tells of "Mr. Canning's approbation of my conduct." It is uplifting to be able to turn from such a viewpoint of the South Americans to the following: "We behold there the glorious spectacle of eighteen millions of people struggling to burst their chains and be free." So spake Henry Clay, the man who had more to do with the recognition of the independence of those colonies, both in baking the pudding and in pulling out the plum, than did ever the boastful Canning. From 1816 on, both in Congress and outside, Henry Clay never ceased his efforts. In the winter of 1821, long before Canning's suggestion to Rush, Clay secured the passage in Washington of the resolution that "the House of Representatives participate with the people of the United States in the deep interest which they feel for the Spanish provinces of South America, which are struggling to establish their liberty and independence, and that it will give its constitutional support to the President of the United States whenever he may deem it expedient to recognize the sovereignty and independence of any of the said provinces." In 1822 President Monroe published the formal recognition, which was the crown to Clay's long struggle. The modern South Americans have forgotten the persistent and intelligently strenuous friendship of Henry Clay, so deceived

have they been by constant reiterations of the Canning Myth. Their forefathers loved him so well that more than once were there read aloud at the head of their revolutionary armies portions of the speeches he was making in Congress from 1816 to 1820, urging the recognition of their independence. His altruistic efforts in their behalf and interest in their war for freedom, find an echoing note in the touching friendship of Lafayette for our own people under similar circumstances. Henry Clay was actuated by no other motive than admiration for the struggles of a gallant people, and a passionate yearning that their independence be once and for all time recognized by his own beloved land, which had by so short a time preceded them in entering the family of nations. Henry Clay was tainted with no wish to use their liberty as a pawn in the game of politics, nor was he willing to give them back to Spain, nor to allow European colonization later on to rob them of their hard-earned sovereignty!

Now that the dusty tomes of old correspondence have given up their secrets, we may at last cast away the belief that there was due to the play of intrigue in European courts, that great boon to South America of freedom forever from their intermeddling. No longer need the boasts of a sharp-witted politician continue to enjoy the confidence of credulous peoples who knew only of what he publicly said, and not of what he privately wrote. Away with the long-credited myth that put the Monroe Doctrine out of step with the majestic onward march of republican free government! The tree of American liberty becomes all the more symmetrical, since we learn that the Monroe Doctrine is one of its own branches, and not an alien growth grafted upon it. Let the policy announced in Monroe's message fit into its proper place in the orderly sequence of benefits won for political liberty in this hemisphere by that immortal document, the Declaration of Independence, which in express terms acknowledged as its inspiration a power immeasurably higher than politicians for whom political liberty is but a tool to use, and, when used, to discard.